

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH - ANALYSIS - OCTOBER 3, 1983

1. LEBANON: GEMAYEL APPROACHES NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

President Gemayel will enter any national reconciliation negotiation initially to probe how much he would have to concede to the opposition without provoking a major conflict with the Phalange and LP. Gemayel may try to work toward accommodating Druze/Muslim interests in a cabinet reshuffle, but he will not risk initiating institutional reforms that seriously diminish Maronite preeminence. Indeed, pushing him too quickly in this direction would accelerate a confrontation with the increasingly suspicious and volatile Christian right that could trigger the complete collapse of the negotiations.

State Dept. review completed

Gemayel is not an ideologue with a broad vision of reform for Lebanon's political system. He is, on the contrary, a traditional Lebanese politician who views change as occurring incrementally and as a result of backroom deals with other key elites. During his lengthy experience in Lebanon's parliament he acquired a reputation as an adept negotiator and a skilled behind-the-scenes operator.

Gemayel will bring these skills to the political negotiations but will proceed cautiously. He is acutely aware that accommodating Muslims and Druze is the key to some degree of political harmony and has developed good relations with key traditional Sunni and Shia elites. He will continue his efforts to strike a modus vivendi with Shia leader Nabih Barri by offering him a political role in a new government and economic benefits to the Shia community. He also must establish a new relationship with Walid Jumblatt. Thus, Gemayel will try to defuse the pressure for radical reform of institutions by enunciating noncontroversial principles on national reconciliation to which all Lebanese can aspire while attempting to coopt other key leaders.

None of this, however, should obscure the fact that Gemayel is a Maronite reared in Phalangist party circles. However sensitive he claims to be to Muslim and Druze interests, he believes in a Lebanon in which Christians play the preeminent role. Moreover, Gemayel is not a strong personality and is trapped between an overbearing father and the memory of a charismatic brother in whose shadow he still lives. He will not risk selling out his heritage and crossing Shaikh Pierre, the Phalange, or the LP.

Gemayel increasingly will look to the US for assistance in finding a narrow middle ground acceptable to the opposition and the Christian right. Although he realizes this may not be possible, he is serious about initiating a national dialogue provided we understand the constraints under which he is operating. Pressing Gemayel to initiate major concessions without finding a way to check Muslim, Druze, and Syrian demands for radical change will end in disaster. The LP may be weakened by the Shuf fighting but it is capable of triggering the collapse of the national reconciliation process.

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